

## ENGLISH 676. Studies in Southern Literature: Contemporary Genre and Geography

Fall 2012: Thursdays 6–8:30, Bondurant  
112W

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### DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Looking at writing of the colonial, antebellum, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow eras, scholars argue that representations of the U.S. South have been used to stage certain postulates regarding race, economic and political relations, and social values; these implicit arguments both produce and depend upon literary genres (such as the slave narrative, the plantation romance, literary adaptations of folklore and blues, the Gothic and grotesque, etc.). In this class, we will consider how writers in more recent decades have challenged, shifted, or recapitulated earlier genres (from this region and elsewhere); we will also examine the extent to which generic revision in representation of the U.S. South is influenced by broader literary and social change (changing media environments, economic globalization, etc.). Finally, we will ask what the changing genres and geographies of these novels tell us regarding literary uses of the region today.

Accordingly, in this course, students will:

- Develop greater understanding of literary genre and its responsiveness to social change,
- Develop greater ability to assess the significance of aesthetic choices regarding contemporary representations of the U.S. South,
- Hone skills in collaborative and independent research and analysis, and
- Hone skills in written and oral expression.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

Available at University Bookstore (though no specific edition is required):

- Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972)
- Cormac McCarthy, *Child of God* (1974)
- Charles Johnson, *Oxherding Tale* (1982)
- Gloria Naylor, *Mama Day* (1988)
- Lewis Nordan, *Wolf Whistle* (1993)
- Erna Brodber, *Louisiana* (1994)
- Daniel Woodrell, *Tomato Red* (1998)
- LeAnne Howe, *Shell Shaker* (2001)
- Colson Whitehead, *John Henry Days* (2001)
- Zakes Mda, *Cion* (2007)
- Alice Randall, *Rebel Yell* (2009)
- Kathryn Stockett, *The Help* (2009)

All other readings will be made available on Blackboard under “Online Readings.”

## POLICIES

- Due dates have been scheduled to facilitate class discussion as well as progress on independent research. Lateness (beyond a certain point) will damage your grade. If you discover that you cannot meet a deadline, contact me immediately to establish a revised schedule.
- You are expected to uphold the University Creed (<http://www.olemiss.edu/info/creed.html>), particularly its clauses on civility, integrity, academic honesty, and academic freedom. Failure to do so will damage your grade.
- It is university policy to provide, on a flexible and individual basis, reasonable classroom accommodations to students who have verified disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or meet course requirements. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations.

## GRADES

Your course grade will be determined by a weighted average:

- Class participation: 20%
- (Almost) weekly writing: 20%
- “Conference” presentation: 12.5%
- Documents related to final paper (bibliography, research statement, etc.): 12.5%
- Final paper: 35%

You must complete all assigned work to pass this class. You are expected to participate in every class. Except in rare and dire circumstances, more than two absences will substantially damage your grade; more than four will result in failure of the course.

## CLASS PARTICIPATION AND (ALMOST) WEEKLY WRITING

Note that one objective of this class is to “hone skills in collaborative and independent research and analysis.” Active participation—in every class, by every student—is crucial to fulfilling this goal and is accordingly required. For each class, you should be prepared to discuss views shared by other participants in the course, but you are also required to bring questions or comments based on certain passages in the course reading.

Eight times this semester, you will be required to submit writing about the week’s reading to a forum on Blackboard. These “calls” and “responses” will be organized by rotating groups: each week, every member of one group will write a “call,” the members of another group will respond to those calls, and one group will have the week off. “Calls” should consist of about 300–500 words, and should reflect on how that week’s reading picks up or alters our course themes: you have great flexibility here, but one option would be to highlight something about the text (fictional or theoretical)—some passage or attribute—and explain how it led you to think in new ways about the discussions we have been having. “Responses” should be similar in length, and should, effectively, continue the work of the “call”: how did the passage or attribute it highlights strike you when you first read the text, and what new questions or observations emerge upon contemplating your classmate’s “call”? Here, too, you have great flexibility, but slightly more responsibility: where “calls” should reveal significant engagement with course themes and the reading, “responses”

should reflect careful thought on both of those as well as the “call.”

**NB:** “Calls” are due by the “end of day” on Monday before class, and “responses” are due by noon on the Thursday of class. (These times are adjusted slightly for the week of Oct. 7–13, as listed below.) Don’t forget to provide your posting a substantive title!

## RESEARCH PAPER AND PRESENTATION

You will develop the topic for your final research paper in consultation with the professor. Students enrolled in Master’s programs should aim for approximately 4500 words; students in doctoral programs should plan for 6000–7500 words. All papers must be accompanied by each of the following related documents submitted via Blackboard by the due dates. A rubric providing guidelines for how the final paper will be assessed is also available on Blackboard in “Research projects/Final papers.”

### PROPOSAL

You should communicate with the professor about your plans for the final project during October (if not before), but you must submit a proposal via the forum on Blackboard: Research Projects/Proposal by Oct. 26 (end of day). This proposal need not posit a thesis, but should articulate the line of investigation that you plan to pursue, as well as the main texts on which you will write. You need to articulate your research question clearly, and explain how you will approach that question. The extent to which I can helpfully advise you will depend on the quality and quantity of information you provide me here. Length may vary widely—from .5 to 1.5 pages, for example—and formats may vary too. (You may combine paragraphs and bulleted lists, for example.)

### ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Include six (for (M.A.) or 10 (for Ph.D.) scholarly sources that you may cite in your final project. (Feel free to ask if you aren't sure what counts as "scholarly"; that could make for an interesting discussion!) Provide full citation information for each source (MLA or Chicago style), as well as a brief description of the argument (major claims, methodology, etc.) Also, describe the relevance of each item to your project. For example: will you be disputing this author’s claim? Will it be used to support a certain section of your argument? Will it be used to provide historical context or methodological support (in which case, describe)? If it turns out that this item may not be useful in your project (and you should not submit a bibliography in which no items will be useful), how has reading it helped to shape your plans for the project? Please submit these bibliographies via the forum on Blackboard: Research Projects/ Annotated Bibliography by Nov. 12 (noon).

### FORMAL DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH PROBLEM (Intro Draft)

The purpose of this document is not only to crystallize your argument, but also to develop a clearer sense of your audience. Where your initial proposal provided a more general sense of your project, this document should explain your contribution to your scholarly (or institutional) field more precisely. For what purpose are you pursuing

this project? What audience will be interested in your project? This document should be about 1–1.5 double-spaced pages long and may serve as a draft of your introduction. In an appendix, you should also specify what terms and contexts you will need to clarify for the audience you have targeted. Please submit these statements via the forum on Blackboard: Research Projects/Intro Draft by Monday, Nov. 26 (end of day).

### “CONFERENCE” PRESENTATION

- Your presentation will provide a brief overview of your final project. It should clearly and concisely describe:
  - the problem/question you have chosen to investigate,
  - existing scholarship on this question,
  - your methodology, and
  - your preliminary conclusions.
- In presenting your research findings to your classmates, you have an excellent opportunity to enhance the development of your final project. As you prepare your presentation, consider carefully:
  - how to explain the significance or purpose of your project, and
  - how to organize and articulate your work in an audience-friendly manner.
- Presentations should last from 15–20 minutes; after 20 minutes, speakers will be forced to stop. (Warnings will be provided). Your “text” for these presentations will necessarily be shorter than your paper, so edit wisely.
- Students are expected to provide questions and feedback for their classmates’ presentations. You will not be required to attend the entire day of the “conference,” but you must attend at least 2 sessions, and attendance and participation are just as important during this meeting as they are earlier in the semester.
- Feel free to supplement your talk with images, video or audio clips, presentation software, and/or well-formatted handouts. Please also share these materials if possible via the forum on Blackboard: Research Projects/Presentation aids.
- Presentations will be graded according to:
  - Vigor of research and analysis,
  - Clarity and organization of content, and
  - Style (use of media, consideration of audience, response to questions, etc.).

### SCHEDULE

#### Th, 8/23 Introduction

Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, opening pages through chap. 10 (p. 28)

Tzvetan Todorov, from *Genres in Discourse* (1978/1990)

Lucinda MacKethan, “Genres of Southern Literature” (2004) at

<http://southernspaces.org/2004/genres->

[southern-literature](#)

Th, 8/30 *Mumbo Jumbo*, 29–end

Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre" (1980)

Kenneth Warren, from *What Was African American Literature?* (2011)

**Call: group 1, due 8/27 (e.o.d.)**

**Response: group 2, due 8/30 noon**

**Th, 9/6** Cormac McCarthy, *Child of God* (1974)

Ellen Glasgow, "Heroes and Monsters" (1935)

Anthony Harkins, from *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (2004)

**Call: group 2, due 9/3 (e.o.d.)**

**Response: group 3, due 9/6 noon**

**Th, 9/13** Charles Johnson, *Oxherding Tale* (1982)

Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, from *Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (1990)

**Call: group 3, due 9/10 (e.o.d.)**

**Response: group 1, due 9/13 noon**

**Th, 9/20** Gloria Naylor, *Mama Day* (1988)

Madhu Dubey, from *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism* (2003)

**Call: group 1, due 9/17 (e.o.d.)**

**Response: group 2, due 9/20 noon**

**Th, 9/27** Lewis Nordan, *Wolf Whistle* (1993)

Scott Romine, from *The Real South: Southern Narrative in the Age of Cultural Reproduction* (2008)

**Call: group 2, due 9/24 (e.o.d.)**

**Response: group 3, due 9/27 noon**

**Th, 10/4** Erna Brodber, *Louisiana* (1994)

Yogita Goyal, from *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature* (2010)

**Call: group 3, due 10/1 (e.o.d.)**

**Response: group 1, due 10/4 noon**

**S, 10/13** Daniel Woodrell, *Tomato Red* (1998) **\*NOTE DATE CHANGE! We'll meet from 9-11:30 am.**

**Choose from** Brian Carpenter, "Introduction: Blood and Bone," from *Grit Lit: A Rough South Reader* (2012) **OR** Edward Dimendberg, from *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (2004)

**Call: group 1, due 10/9 (e.o.d.)**

**Response: group 2, due 10/12 noon**

**Th, 10/18** LeAnne Howe, *Shell Shaker* (2001)

Melanie Benson Taylor, from *Reconstructing the Native South: American Indian Literature and the Lost Cause* (2011)

**Call: group 2, due 10/15 (e.o.d.)**

**Response: group 3, due 10/18 noon**

**Th, 10/25** Colson Whitehead, *John Henry Days* (2001)

**Choose from** Guy Debord, from *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) **OR** Trey Ellis, "The New Black Aesthetic" (1989)

**Call: group 3, due 10/22 (e.o.d.)**

**Response: group 1, due 10/25 noon**

**F, 10/26 Initial proposal due (end of day)**

**Th, 11/1** Zakes Mda, Cion (2007)

**Choose from** Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire" (1989) **OR**

David Berliner, "The Abuses of Memory: Reflections on the Memory Boom in Anthropology" (2005)

**Call: group 1, due 10/29 (e.o.d.)**

**Response: group 2, due 11/1 noon**

**Th, 11/8** Kathryn Stockett, The Help (2009)

Lauren Berlant, from The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture (2008)

**Call: group 2, due 11/5 (e.o.d.)**

**Response: group 3, due 11/8 noon**

**M, 11/12**

**Annotated bibliography due by noon!**

**Th, 11/15**

Alice Randall, Rebel Yell (2009)

**Call: group 3, due 11/12 (e.o.d.)**

**Response: group 1, due 11/15 noon**

**M, 11/26**

**Draft of introduction due by end of day!**

**S, 12/1 CONFERENCE: PRESENTATION DUE!**

**Note change of date and time (9-4): panel schedule will be arranged after students choose topics.**

**W, 12/5 FINAL PAPERS DUE AT NOON!**